

**TESTIMONY OF
KIMBERLY T. NELSON
CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER AND
ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR
OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Kimberly T. Nelson and I am the Chief Information Officer and Assistant Administrator for Environmental Information at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Over the past five years, EPA has supported and worked with the Heinz Center in planning and drafting their "State of the Nation's Ecosystems" Report¹. Administrator Whitman and I are pleased to join you and the Heinz Center in today's discussion and to offer our observations on how their Report contributes to, and strengthens our efforts to develop environmental indicators that will advance EPA's efforts under the President's Management Agenda for achieving measurable results. I would also like to offer you an overview of EPA's Environmental Indicators Initiative and the Agency's plans to issue a draft report on the environment in the next several months.

Today, with the release of the Heinz Report, is a significant day for enriching the nation's knowledge of the diverse ecological resources of the United States. Strong, clear, scientifically-valid

¹ "The State of the Nation's Ecosystems, Measuring the Lands, Waters, and Living Resources of the United States," (2002) The H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics and the Environment, Washington, D.C., published by Cambridge University Press. 270 pp.

information is critical to environmental decision-making and environmental policy. It is my personal and professional belief that the right information, at the right time, and in the right form is key to understanding our environment and the impact it has on citizens. I commend the Heinz Center for their efforts to deliver a report that is aimed at decision-makers and opinion leaders, uses non-technical language and reflects the views of a wide range of stakeholders. EPA continues to seek new ideas and new approaches to identifying and addressing our nation's next generation of environmental challenges. Government and the public need and should be provided with information about environmental and human health conditions, trends and potential threats. The Heinz Report provides a useful collection of indicators that describe their picture of the current state of ecosystems nationwide.

I have read the Heinz Report with great interest. Through the Heinz Center's inclusive process, the nation's scientific experts, leaders from industry, public interest groups, academia and government (including EPA), provide a roadmap to what we know about the nation's ecosystems and equally important -- what we don't know. Their Report presents a large volume of information at a national scale that contributes significantly to expanding our national dialogue. All of us, the stewards and managers of our national environmental resources, need this information and the best science available, so that we can know where we've been, where we are now and what we must do in the years ahead, to ensure that all Americans have cleaner air, purer water, and better-protected land.

When we talk about indicators, we speak of measurements that track environmental conditions over time. For example, EPA's Air Quality Index depicts the measurement of the six criteria air pollutants on a daily basis, and is reported to inform the public on the daily quality of the air. EPA and the Heinz Center agree that additional information is needed to better support environmental indicators

at the national level. The Heinz Center found that of their 103 indicators reported by the Heinz Center, only 56% (58) had sufficient data to be reported nationally. This finding is consistent with our own work and many state efforts to use indicators that describe environmental trends and conditions. EPA and other federal agencies will need to work collaboratively with our partners and stakeholders to identify and prioritize the use and development of the indicators we need. EPA plans to publish a draft report on the environment in the next several months. Last November, Administrator Whitman charged my office, the Office of Environmental Information and the Office of Research and Development, headed by Assistant Administrator and EPA's Science Advisor, Paul Gilman, with developing a report that would launch a broad public dialogue on ways to identify priority areas of national concern, focus our resources and manage our work to achieve measurable results. EPA's Chief of Staff, Eileen McGinnis, is leading the Agency's senior management team in guiding EPA's report. The Agency's draft report on the environment is one aspect of our long-term Environmental Indicators Initiative which will improve our ability to report on the status of and trends in national environmental conditions, the health of our citizens, and the linkages between the two.

EPA believes that environmental indicators help paint a clearer picture of the condition of our country's environment for decision-makers and citizens. By using environmental indicators, the American public and all levels of government gain a better understanding of how our environmental policies can yield better results and how government can be more accountable to the public. The Agency's report will draw as appropriate on the Heinz Center's Report, reports from the National Research Council, EPA's Science Advisory Board, other federal agencies (such as the Department of Interior who is here with us today), more than 30 states and non-governmental organizations to

describe not only environmental conditions, but human health conditions that may be related to the environment. EPA is using sound data and scientifically-based indicators that will strengthen our understanding of national, regional and local, environmental and human health conditions today.

EPA's report will:

- ! describe current environmental conditions and trends using existing data and indicators;
- ! identify data gaps and research needs;
- ! discuss the challenges government and our partners face in filling those gaps; and,
- ! be accompanied by supporting technical information.

Five "theme areas" will be covered in EPA's report: *human health; ecological condition; cleaner air; purer water; and better-protected land*. It will attempt to answer about 100 questions about the nation's environment that the public and EPA feel are important to address. We have identified data that are available to answer these questions, reviewed them for their scientific quality and validity, and selected a group of indicators, that, like the Heinz Report, have either full or partial data to support them. While our first report has a national focus, our future plans include focusing on regional and local indicators as well.

The Agency's web site (www.epa.gov/indicators) provides interested parties with the latest information on our upcoming report. Web site visitors can review an outline of our draft report, the list of indicators that we are considering, the names and affiliations of the national and Agency experts who have been evaluating them, and a list of the other federal agencies and departments, states and tribes who are our partners in this effort. We will publish a draft report in the next several months, peer-review it and make it publicly available. Releasing our draft, report on the environment and our

subsequent public dialogue will represent significant steps toward EPA's long-term goal of making ourselves accountable to the American public and reporting to them on our progress in reaching the goals we have set for ourselves in protecting the health of our nation's citizens, and our air, water, and land.

Both the Heinz Center Report and EPA's report on the environment have a number of important implications for us.

- ! They help focus public attention on real environmental results.
- ! They point to the fact that we know a lot, and yet, we still have a long way to go.
- ! They provide a roadmap for future research on data needs and indicators.
- ! They reinforce EPA's efforts to design and build an integrated information exchange network with our partners.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee and the Heinz Center for inviting EPA to participate in this hearing and today's earlier press conference on the Center's Report. Administrator Whitman and I applaud the Heinz Center for their significant contribution to our understanding of the nation's ecosystems. EPA is committed to continue working with the Heinz Center on our complementary reports.

I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.